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SUBJECT: SEX TRAFFICKING IN MADHYA PRADESH

Summary

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1. (U) Development professionals in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh (MP) told Consul General and EconOff that the northwest corner of the state served as a steady source for sex workers, due to the existence of so-called "prostitute castes" in several villages. While these interlocutors commended the trans-border cooperation between the state governments of MP and Rajasthan in attempting to rehabilitate rescued victims, apparently there is little, if any, effort in MP to prosecute traffickers. End Summary.

Northwest MP Source Area for Trafficking Victims

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2. (U) Consul General and EconOff met representatives of UK's Department for International Development (DfID), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and CARE-India in Bhopal on November 27. In addition to other issues, the group explained their consensus perception of sex trafficking in the state of MP.

3. (U) According to these observers, northwest MP is a reliable source area for sex trafficking victims due to caste realities in several villages, where girls are sold to work in Mumbai and New Delhi. Following old societal practices, all first-born daughters of the Banchhara, Bedia, and Sansia castes (formerly "untouchables") have been working in MP as prostitutes to support their families since migrating to the area in the 17th century. Many of these communities were originally from Rajasthan, where similar communities exist today, following the same practices.

NGOs Cite Challenges Battling Cultural, Economic Imperatives

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4. (U) The NGO group described anti-trafficking efforts in MP as "very challenging" since "prostitute caste" families defend their behavior as a cultural tradition and economic imperative. After the Maharashtra state government closed Mumbai's dance bars, for instance, many former "dancers" from MP -- who were really prostitutes -- returned home to join the ranks of the unemployed. The financial situation of the former dancers and their families remained precarious because the dancers were their families' main revenue earners. Our sources told us that the families were now pressuring the dancers to return to work in the big cities, either as dancers or openly as prostitutes. There was no evidence offered that prostitution within MP is on the rise due to the girls return, which thus remains an open issue.

5. (U) While the MP and Rajasthan state governments reportedly cooperate well in repatriating those victims who want to be rescued, prosecution rarely occurs because the victims are unwilling to press charges against the traffickers, who are often their fathers and brothers. We are still attempting to access official police records, such as they exist, but note that neither our group of experts, nor the state's Chief Secretary, knew of any action against families who sell their

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daughters to a life of prostitution or against any other traffickers, for that matter.

Comment

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6. (U) The NGO representatives' claims appear credible and were corroborated to EconOff by the local Maharaja's adult son, who offered similar descriptions of this unfortunate local custom. The key to cultural reform, in this case, is a combination of poverty reduction measures, education, job skills training and, not least, prosecution. End Comment.

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